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Guatemala Joins Quemoy As a Great Debate Issue

The Nixon-Kennedy campaign is unique among recent presidential races in respect to the foreign policy debate. The candidates, instead of discussing our attitudes toward major powers, Russia excepted, are confining themselves largely to tiny islands off the Chinese mainland and tin powers. The progression has been: Quemoy, Matsu, Cuba and Guatemala.

Guatemala was injected into the debate by Vice President Nixon in the fourth Kennedy-Nixon television confrontation:

"We can do," said Nixon, with reference to Cuba, "what we did with Guatemala. There was a Communist dictator that we inherited from the previous administration. We quarantined Mr. Arbenz. The result was that the Guatemalan people themselves rose up and they threw him out."

Kennedy did not take up the reference to Guatemala. Indeed, Robert F. Kennedy, the candidate's brother and campaign manager, said in a television interview two days later: "Either (Nixon) is trying to take credit for this administration for intervening in (Latin America) or the subject should never have been brought up."

It remained for the Washington Post to observe: "In talking piously of 'quarantine,' Mr. Nixon seemed to be exaggerating the amount of general naivete about what actually happened in the ouster of the Communist regime in Guatemala."

And Walter Lippman commented on the same day: "What Mr. Kennedy advocated looks towards doing in Cuba what the administration did do in Guatemala. The only difference is that Mr. Kennedy very unwisely said what he would do about Cuba in the future, whereas the Eisenhower administration has been boasting about what it did do in the past in Guatemala."

What did the administration do in Guatemala?

When a consignment of Czech arms was shipped to Guatemala via Poland in May 1954, neighboring Nicaragua took fright and called for a meeting of American foreign ministers under the Rio Treaty. A session had been scheduled for July 7 when, on June 18, Guatemala was invaded from Honduras by an expedition led by an exiled officer of the Guatemalan army, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas.

The Arbenz government immediately

appealed to both the Organization of American States and the United States Security Council for aid to repel aggression. Later it withdrew the appeal to OAS, and the Soviet Union vetoed a Security Council resolution to refer the matter to OAS.

The United States took the position, in the Security Council, that Guatemala was not a victim of aggression because the incident was in the nature of a civil war. That question became academic when Castillo Armas ousted the Arbenz government at the end of June.

Secretary of State Dulles on June 30, 1954, laid the overthrow to the "just wrath of the Guatemalan people." But historian J. Fred Rippy asserts flatly that the coup was accomplished "with encouragement and assistance from the United States."

The strong suspicion in Washington is that it was an operation of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Cuba now charges before the UN General Assembly that Guatemala is the base for a US-backed invasion of Cuba expected "within a few days." Foreign Minister Raul Roa of Cuba on Oct. 26 charged that both Kennedy and Nixon in their "shameless debate" had agreed that the United States should "use the same methods as it used in Guatemala in 1954."

This damaging remark is one product of the Nixon-Kennedy debates that cannot be listed on their credit side.